

2011 State of the City  
City of Woodstock, GA  
Donnie Henriques, Mayor  
January 23, 2012

When we look back years from now, I believe that we will say that 2011 was clearly the year that the City of Woodstock turned the corner in our road to recovery from the Great Recession. The numbers will clearly show that the Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2011 was the last year in a three-year long process to correct problems and errors from the past, to include having previously financed a new wastewater treatment plant on a four- year loan which resulted in the erosion of the City's Reserve Fund when the economy went into recession and building all but stopped.

The City adopted a balanced budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2011 and has begun the process of rebuilding our Reserve Fund, as the numbers will bear. All while not having to drastically reduce services to our residents and businesses and making great progress towards accomplishing the goals as set by this City Council.

**General Administration**

In November, 2011, Council Members Casdia and Basford were re-elected to four-year terms. Liz Baxter, who has previously served on the Council, was also elected to serve a four-year term.

We developed a branding concept for the former Woodstock Community Church site which is now known as City Center. City Park became The Park at City Center.

In July, the Chambers at City Center opened and City Council meetings were moved from the Annex back Downtown, fulfilling a commitment previous made by the Council. The Chambers were dedicated to the memory of former City Clerk and the City's first female Mayor, Evelyn Chambers.

The Town Lake Art Center also relocated to the Theatre at City Center and has now become the Elm Street Cultural Arts Village.

Our Human Resources Department has increased the amount and variety of training programs for employees. In 2011, HR has presented Accident Investigation and Reporting for all supervisors, as well as Diversity, Harassment and Discrimination training for the Public Works Department.

Our Safety Committee, in conjunction with HR, hosted a Defensive Driver Training for non-public safety employees.

Finally, the City changed our 401/457 Plan Provider from Nationwide to ICMA-RC, resulting in savings for both employees and the City.

## **Finance Department**

The Annex Building and a previous bond issue which had been used to finance the automated meters for the water meters was refinanced, resulting in a savings of over \$568,000 during the next twelve years, a 6.7% present value savings.

Average property taxes were reduced in the City by 4.02%.

The Finance Department eliminated the service charge associated with on-line water payments, which produced an approximate savings of 4% for our customers.

For the Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2011, the City reduced the General Fund Operating Budget from the previous year by 6.9%, representing a change from \$16.3 million to \$15.2 million. All City budgets were reduced from \$29.9 million to \$28.3 million, a total reduction of 5.3%.

The City received its 18<sup>th</sup> Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting.

## **Community Development Department**

The City saw the first senior facility constructed under the Senior Living Development Code when Hearthside was completed. Hearthside contains some 100 senior living units. I take great pride in this project as Richard Mcleod, Brian Stockton and myself, working with Kathryn Lawler of the ARC, and Rep. Charlice Byrd and others toiled over this code for over a year, starting in December 2005, before I was sworn in. My thanks to all that contributed to this successful ordinance.

Walton Communities broke ground on Walton Woodstock, a 300+ unit multi-family and commercial development in Downtown. The first phase of the Grid Street Plan is being constructed as part of this project – a long held goal of the Council.

Zoning was approved for the Horizons outlet mall project which will consist of a 365,000 square foot outlet center. Some 800 construction jobs will be created with this project. Over 1300 full-time jobs will be created when the project opens, along with 1600 part-time and seasonal jobs.

On a related note, the City completed a four day intensive planning charette with the company Placemakers and the public in order to help create the vision for the future of the Ridgewalk area.

The long awaited LCI project was completed Downtown and has now become what we refer to as Phase 1 of the Streetscapes program. The City also received a \$700,000 grant for Phase 2 of the Streetscapes, which will extend the existing improvements north of the Main Street and TLP/AM intersection to Rusk Street.

The LCI Project received an award from the PEDS pedestrian advocacy group for "Best Suburban Retrofit".

After a long process, the City adopted a much needed new Sign Ordinance.

We became the first municipality in the State of Georgia to install a public electric vehicle charging station, which was paid for by a grant I might add. Beating the City of Atlanta by 1 month.

The City issued \$40,000 in rebates to local builders for including green building technologies in their building, also funded by a grant.

We saw our first LEED certified building in Woodstock open when Dr. Michael Pratt completed his new Woodstock ENT building. This was a cooperative effort with Dr. Pratt, with thanks again going to Brian Stockton for facilitating the project.

The City was awarded the Silver certification in ARC's Green Communities program.

Development Services Representative Katie Coulborn received her LEED Accreditation.

As a sign of the improvement of our Woodstock economy, 214 new occupational licenses were issued, along with 109 single family home permits, up from 67 in 2010.

The City of Woodstock Property Maintenance Code was adopted, which will become a useful tool in protecting property values. Building Official Duane Helton, Deputy Official Jeremy Parker and Code Enforcement Officer Keith Kenney were certified as Property Maintenance and Housing Inspectors in support of this new Code.

Code Enforcement Officer Paul Brown received his Level 1 certification from the Georgia Association of Code Enforcement.

Finally, GIS completed a comprehensive survey of sidewalks throughout the City. SideNote: Upon receiving the report and before reading it, CM Mueller immediately determined the need for more.

### **Economic Development Services/DDA/Main Street Program**

Through November 2011, 21 new businesses opened Downtown creating 146 new jobs.

Downtown also saw the construction of 26 new residential units, 24 building rehabilitations and a total of \$9.2 million in public/private investment in 2011.

Main Street moved their Morning Buzz meetings to the Chambers at City Center and averaged over 70 in attendance.

Woodstock was recognized as both a Georgia and National Main Street Accredited City.



Woodstock was selected to be the host site for the 2012 Georgia Main Street Institute, bringing between 100 and 125 downtown professionals to our town in March of this year.

Over 8,000 visitors came through the Visitor's Center in Dean's Store in 2011. Setting another new record for this site.

### **Fire Department**

WFD responded to some 3,800 calls for service in 2011.

The Fire Department was re-evaluated by the Insurance Service Office (ISO) and maintained our rating of 3. This is no small feat when you consider that the City's population has more than doubled since the last rating in the 1990's.

A Fire Dept. Bike Team was established to help with the trail system and special events in Downtown. Funds from our partnership with Gas South were used to establish the team.

Over 8,000 people were served by the Fire Safety Education Program through station tours and special events.

New voice amplifiers and microphone lanyards were purchased to improve firefighter safety.

We are certainly proud of what our firefighters do each and every day to serve and protect the public. However, I would be remiss if I didn't recognize FF David Gray who is back to full duty after being seriously injured in the line of duty fighting a residential structure fire.

### **Parks and Recreation**

Funded development of Phase 2 of the Taylor Randahl Mountain Bike Trail: the Explorer Loop is a 2.5 mile beginner to immediate trail that was added.

Construction of the pedestrian bridge across Little River was completed. No small feat considering this project dates back to 2000.

Finalized design of three segments of multi-use trail connecting Downtown to Towne Lake and Hwy 92 along the Noonday Creek corridor.

The Community Center was rebranded as Magnolia Hall.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Concert Series completed another successful year. Concerts were moved to the lower portion of the Park at City Center. Edwin McCain, Low Cash Cowboys, Midnight Star, Wet Willie and The Return were the headlining acts.

Concept plans for the Amphitheatre at City Center were presented to Council and approved. The department issued an RFP for naming rights for the amphitheatre.

The parking lot at the William G. Long Senior Center was expanded and resurfaced. A pavilion was also added with a CDBG grant.

The department also offered many wonderful events in the Park at City Center, to include the Brown Bag Concert Series, 9/11 Day of Remembrance Ceremony, and Memorial Day and Veteran's Day ceremonies to name just a few.

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Mayor's Cup pool tournament was held, and will be joined this month by the Dr. Jan Henriques Bridge Tournament, both sponsored by Progressive Audiology, and this past year, additional sponsorship from Billy Hayes and Northside Cherokee allowed for upgraded prizes to all of the winners.

A special shout out to American Legion Post 316, Woodstock Jaycees and Stacy Walls, Kings Academy, Woodstock & Etowah ROTCs, Pastor Ross Wiseman and Momentum Church, and the Woodstock Warblers, among others for helping put on the City's events each year. Without their help, most of these highlights throughout the year would not be possible.

### **Police Department**

Our department became the first public agency in the state to offer the Nation of Neighbors program, an on-line neighborhood watch program. We now have over 600 participants in this program.

We had twenty graduates of our Citizens Police Academy in 2011.

A new Reserve Officer Program was launched and we had three officers graduate from the police academy in July. We currently have fifteen Auxiliary Officers in the department that help with parades, concerts and other events.

Our Explorers Program has fourteen participants, and won 1<sup>st</sup> Place at the 2011 Winterfest Explorer competition in the Warrant Service category.

A new Police Department Foundation was established in 2011. This non-profit foundation was established to serve both the needs of deserving officers, but the public and community as well.

Finally, we saw Chief David Bores retire at the end of December. Chief Bores served us well for three years and came along at a time when our department really needed someone like him. He will be missed.

### **Public Works**

Cleaned-up and removed 95 tons of debris after a tornado hit Deer Run and Brookshire. Notable is the public praise from residents on the job the department did.

Demolished Building C at City Center in preparation of the future TLP/AM Road Widening Project.

Demolished the flood damaged Walden Chase Apartment Complex which the City acquired with a FEMA grant in preparation for a future park. This park will consist of 11 acres, including our first dog park, following in the plans to continue offering more choices for P&R to our residents.

Completed the first Asphalt Reclamation Project in the City for the entrance of the Brookshire Subdivision.

Upgraded the technology for the traffic lights Downtown to enable them to record traffic counts, which will help us project traffic patterns in the future to help us make necessary timing adjustments.

Improved the Public Works facility by adding the pole barn which will allow for equipment to be protected from the elements.

We purchased four snow plows that can be mounted to existing equipment for use during inclement weather. This will allow our MVP Dept. of 2011 to continue to improve response time and services to our businesses and residents during emergencies.

Public Works repaved 2.2 miles of roads in the city and restriped 3.1 miles of roads.

Stormwater installed a French Drain System at the intersection of Running Deer Parkway and Moccasin Trail to carry springs that had surfaced under the road.

We purchased a street sweeper and began a regular sweeping program for City streets.

Stormwater also completed a stream restoration and drainage improvement project at Sabrina Court.

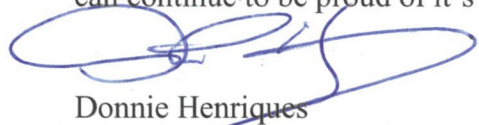
### **Closing**

As you can tell, 2011 was a very busy and successful year for the City. 2012 promises even more successes.



Our early planning had us constructing and completing the majority of the new amphitheater as well as beginning phase I of the turn lane at TL/Main St. However, due to budgetary constraints, CC will have to make some decisions and choices at it's upcoming retreat next month. On the subject of the retreat, a local editorial called us and the BOC out for not doing our retreats locally and saving taxpayer money. It did reference 5 star restaurants as part of our venue. I take exception to this broad brush writing and thinking. When I became Mayor, the first thing I did was to attempt to hold our retreats locally, which we did for the first 4 years of my administration. But, as the editorial says, CC members as well as others were constantly pulled away or distracted by other duties, both work and personal. While it's easy to say as an elected official you have to devote your complete attention to the retreat during it's time, when that cell phone goes off and there is a spouse on the other end asking for help with some domestic matter, you cannot say NO.....family comes first. So, last year, I asked CC for permission to go to Hiawasee for our retreat. Let me assure the public, the Ramada we stay and meet in, while a nice location, is not very high on the "star" scale. It's restaurant, while good, would not be classed as a "five star".....maybe two. In conclusion of this issue, last year was far more successful a retreat because everyone was focused and not distracted by outside sources. The price to pay for the taxpayers is, in my opinion, well worth it.

It's hard for me to predict what will happen in 2012 until we have this retreat, however, I can predict one thing....Woodstock will continue to grow and prosper and it's residents can continue to be proud of it's Town, and it's leadership team.



Donnie Henriques  
Woodstock Mayor  
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